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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000209

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTORAL CONSULTATIONS: U.S., ALLIES MEET

CLASSIFIED BY: JUNE CARTER PERRY, AMBASSADOR, EXEC , STATE .  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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11. Summary: Ambassador hosted Chiefs of Missions of the United Kingdom (Dean), South Africa, and the UN Resident Coordinator (UNDP Representative Hodan Haji-Mohamud) to discuss facilitation of a tri-partite meeting between Government of Lesotho (GOL), Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and opposition parties. During the course of the meeting held the morning of April 22 in the Ambassador's office, we spoke by phone with Former Minister of Home Affairs and now Communications Minister, Thomas Thabane, concerning a tri-partite meeting which the government has concurred would be held on Monday, April 25. Key members of the Diplomatic Corps believe it necessary to have such an inclusive gathering of all parties to emphasize the objectives of the elections occurring April 30; free, fair and inclusive elections; and to lay the ground work for the next elections (2007). We believe that we have now made substantial progress in engaging the government through the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and also Ministers of Justice and Communications to help underscore the importance of a peaceful, election/decentralization process in Lesotho. End Summary

12. Members of the Diplomatic Corps have been meeting over the past three weeks with members of the government of Lesotho, the IEC and representatives of the opposition parties. In conversations with the government and the wider diplomatic corps on April 21, we emphasized the importance of peaceful, free and fair elections. We received confirmation via a telephone conversation with Minister Thabane on April 22, that the government would send invitations to all 24 opposition parties, to the IEC and to the diplomatic community for the April 25 meeting which is to occur at the Convention Center in Maseru. Throughout our conversations (and this was reemphasized in my conversation with Minister Thabane today) we requested the Diplomatic Corps be invited as observers. The government has been pressing us to serve as Chair of such a meeting. The U.S., the UN, and the UK have consistently and determinately responded that it is the Government's role to secure a neutral Chair and that we would be present as observers only. We note that the South African High Commissioner has been trying to pressure the UN representative to Chair such a meeting. She has repeatedly refused to do so and has indicated that the UN is there solely as a neutral observer and in all cases throughout Africa would work as necessary only through regional organizations. I have made clear to the South African High Commissioner that it is not appropriate for the UK, the U.S. or the UN to chair this session and that if any outside diplomatic representative were to do so, it would be inappropriate intervention in national affairs and subject to misrepresentation by the public and the press. At the same time, we, the U.S., have emphasized the helpful role that we and donors play in assisting the government institutionalize democracy and with all stakeholders to understand the importance of strict adherence to the April 30 date; free, fair, peaceful and inclusive elections, and laying the ground work for the next elections (which would be the 2007 National Elections) in Lesotho. The four key planners in the international community have been ourselves, the UN, the UK and SA, although the latter brings its own political baggage given its history with Lesotho. Therefore, the U.S., the UK and the UN Chiefs of Mission have also conducted a sustained separate dialogue on our common goals which we believe are more objective and less subject to negative interpretation than those of the South Africans.

13. Following our April 22 morning meeting at the Chancery, we agreed to remain in contact over the weekend prior to the anticipated Monday, April 25 meeting to be convened by the Government and which we will attend as observers. We also agreed that the Chiefs of Mission would meet with the DPM (who is acting during the overseas travel of the PM) on the elections and related security matters and hope this meeting will take place by Thursday, April 28. We also agreed that the US Assistant Regional Security Officer (ARSO) from Pretoria and the UN Regional Security Officer from Johannesburg would meet with other Missions' security representatives on Wednesday, April 27 at the UNs Conference Center. We concurred that our various staffs, e.g. political and security officers, would continue to

take on-the-ground soundings from now through the elections and that we would share information both related to the electoral process and to security matters.

14. Comment: It is the opinion of the Diplomatic Corps based on the nearly daily series of meetings that we have had, either individually or together with political and security leaders within the GOL, that getting all of the players to agree to an open forum discussion together on April 25 is a step in the right direction. We know from our previous meetings as a group

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that some members of the opposition parties had made veiled threats to carry out disruptive activities if such a tri-partite meeting were not held. We believe the coordination amongst ourselves and our key allies has been substantial and fruitful to this point and we will continue our own interactions and will consult with all stakeholders from now through the April 30 elections. Consultations will continue following those elections during this period of transition and movement toward decentralization. End Comment.